DHYANA

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To

SRI KAPALI SASTRIAR

Who

Launched me into Dhyana



अहमिद्धि पितुष्परि मेधामृतस्य जग्रभ ।

I from my Father have received the Knowledge of Truth.

Rig Veda, VIII. 6. 10.

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Following the Yoga of Dhyana they beheld the Self-Force of the Divine Being.

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In moments when the inner lamps are lit
And the life's cherished guests are left outside
Our spirit sits alone and speaks to its gulfs.

SRI AUROBINDO.

CHAPTER I

DHYANA

WHEN did I begin to know what is Dhyana ? I have tried to remember but without success. But I remember very well when I came to know what is not Dhyana. Once I was sitting by the side of Sri Kapali Sastriar in the early hours of the morning. He was busy otherwise and I was near his chair meditating. After the sitting was over I got up and started to go when he called me back and said :

'You are merely letting things happen. That's not the way.'

I was startled. I had not known he was following me. Immediately I realised

that beyond closing the eyes I was doing nothing. Something was indeed flowing into the head but the mind was wandering from one thought to another and I with it, leaving the vibrating Force of the Mother to itself. I learnt that day that it is not enough that one sits with closed eyes once the movement of the higher or deeper Consciousness has started. It is necessary to be vigilant and keep oneself in the current of the Force without meandering with the mind. One must be present. Dhyana to be successful has to be supported by an active participation of the Dhyani.

Years later it opened my eyes still further when the Mother explained, in one of Her classes to the children of the Ashram, that it was not enough to sit and let meditation go on. One could sit for hours together that way and yet see no concrete results in one's nature.

It becomes a habit and a routine. For meditation to be really effective, She pointed out, it should be dynamic. It must develop into a power changing things from moment to moment and that required an active will, ceaseless attention and a supporting aspiration all the time.

Neither is meditation a discipline uniformly common in its working to all, as generally supposed. Once we had a young visitor — a loquacious social worker with a loud spiritual accent — who had definite views on each and every thing under the sun. No one, he said, could fail to bubble with joy and energy after *true* meditation. Obviously the gentleman did not know that there are several kinds of meditation. There is a meditation which leads one to the threshold of a Vast Silence ; there is a kind which opens the floodgates of

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Knowledge or Power ; there is another which fills one with purity, bhakti and joy, and so on.* Each kind of meditation has its own value and hour. For meditation is a means to an end and the choice of the type of meditation is determined by the need of the sadhana and by the nature of the object sought for. We shall consider in this study the nature and the process of Dhyana in relation to spiritual life in general with particular reference to the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

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* Vide :

Our souls can visit in great lonely hours
Still regions of imperishable Light,
All-seeing eagle-peaks of silent Power
And moon-flame oceans of swift fathomless Bliss
And calm immensities of spirit Space.

(Sri Aurobindo : *Savitri*, Book I, Canto 4.)

CHAPTER II

FORMS OF DHYANA

NORMALLY the faculties of man are all dispersed. His senses are constantly drawn in different directions ; his thoughts are spread out wide and change from moment to moment. When he is called upon to do any work or apply himself to any thought he narrows down this field of dispersion and channels his energies in the occupation on hand. This deliberate indrawal of the energies from their usual course of pell-mell activities and their convergence on a particular object is called concentration. This concentration is seen in varying degrees in the different walks of life. In spiritual life, especially in the

yogic systems of the East, this art of the control and application of mental energies has been developed into a fine science of Dhyana. As perfected and utilised in Yoga, Dhyana has several forms to suit different natures or the different stages of development of the same nature.

Thus there is, first, *contemplation*, which is a steady regard of the mind on an object, e.g. an idea, a form or an image. It may be done inwardly in the mind or on an outer physical object. The object chosen must be one that appeals deeply, *yathābhimatam*.* Such a regard gradually awakens in the mind a knowledge of the object concentrated upon which may be a sacred Name, a verbal formula of spiritual Knowledge or a Murti, a form of the Divine. Not

* Patanjali: *Yoga Sutras*, I. 39.

only a knowledge about the object but also, as the contemplation fixes itself, the central truth of it is revealed. It can also bring in a certain control over the workings of what is so regarded. By concentrating upon the Idea of Love and Bhakti for the Divine, for instance, one can acquire a deep knowledge of their nature and working, cultivate and organise them in oneself and shape one's life into their mould. Concentration of this kind is also a sure means to withdraw the consciousness from the surface being to its deeper levels which are intimately attained in the culminating stages of Contemplation passing into Samadhi.

Next, *meditation* which means a continuous dwelling of the mind on a series of ideas or thoughts forming a single subject. Thus one may meditate upon any aspect or Truth of the Divine, the

Divine in any of His manifestations of Love, Beauty, Power, Knowledge, Joy or the Divine as the Formless Impersonal, or even the Divine as the Transcendent Brahman. In the very act of meditation, the Truth meditated upon grows into one's being.* There is an automatic organisation and extension of the power of Thought in the general consciousness which gradually takes on the stamp of the finer and higher ideas continually emerging in the process. Thus meditation on an object of adoration, like God, induces a flow of thoughts and ideas which fill and bathe the being in vibrations of devotion and love and prepare it for a conversion into a God-child, God-lover or a God-servitor. Meditation

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*याति तत्तत्सरूपताम्,

One becomes what one meditates upon (*Srimad Bhagavatam*, XI. 9. 22).

can be used likewise in the Jnana-marga, Way of Knowledge, for developing the necessary *viveka*, discrimination of the Self from the not-Self, of the Real from the non-Real and for a merger of the being into the Sole Reality of Brahman. The idea of Brahman, for instance, as a Silence supporting all this manifestation in the universe has been found to be a very powerful means of entry into spiritual sadhana. If one mentally conceives of such a silence behind all Name and Form in movement and lets the mind dwell upon it for a while, it is only a question of time before the Pervading Silence begins to make itself felt and settle on the being in the form of a solemn Calm. The mind has to let this Silence enter into it. It must not attempt to seize the Silence as it often does. Then it glides into the being and takes hold of the consciousness by and

by. Meditation should be repeated till the object is realized; there should be *āvṛtti*, says Badarayana.*

Indeed there are other thoughts that disturb and conflict. Especially in the beginning there is a bewildering rush of thoughts, † imaginable and unimaginable — all alien to the object of meditation, with no other purpose than to distract and defeat the effort of the mind. To meet this difficulty there is a form of Dhyana of *observation* which is to stand back from the flow of thoughts

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* *Brahmasutras,* IV. 1. 1.

Also, *Shvet. Up.*:

ध्याननिर्मथनाभ्यासात् देवं पश्येत्

One should realise God by the practice of churning in the form of meditation. (I. 14.)

† "If there be too many thoughts," the Maharshi once told Sri Kapali Sastriar in his earlier days, "keep the eyes open and meditate." It looks difficult, but it is amazingly effective.

without participating in it, let them run, observe them showing up the real nature of the mind and its constitution, and then slowly petering out for want of support from the active intelligence. There is another kind in which one treats the thoughts as foreign to oneself ; they come from the external Prakriti. One learns to stand back in the poise of the Purusha, withhold sanction to the incoming thoughts and refuse to take notice of them. This first leads to a sort of double poise in the being, the undisturbed status of the Purusha and the mechanical field of the Prakriti, and subsequently to a weakening and dwindling of the hold of Prakriti. This takes us to the next step, a more active type of Dhyana, the Dhyana of *liberation*, which is to watch and stop the thoughts determinedly before they get in from outside, and

empty the mind of all its contents so as to make of it a clear surface or an open vacant bowl in which the Higher or Inner Consciousness may settle itself. Yet another way is while rejecting outer thoughts, to become aware of a Peace that is at the back of the mind and hold to it by remembering and opening to it. Gradually the Peace takes root in the being and displaces the running activity of thoughts.

There are three centres in the body in which Dhyana in Yoga is usually done. It may be done in the head or between the eye-brows or in the Heart.* It is not that one concentrates or meditates upon these positions. One stations himself in his consciousness at these centres and keeps it there

* Not the physical heart but what is called the Heart Centre in yogic parlance. It is in the middle of the chest, the cardiac centre.

for the duration of the Dhyana. In certain disciplines it is laid down where one should meditate, in the heart or in the head, etc. But in this Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, the position which comes most naturally to the sadhaka is to be chosen. Note also that at different times different centres feel more natural. That means the system is ready to receive the higher or the inner vibrations through the part governed by that centre and one feels drawn to meditate there at the time. So there is nothing fixed as to where one should concentrate or meditate. As a rule, however, particularly in the early stages, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother advise concentrating or meditating in the *heart*, for the Divine is more easily accessible in this part than in any other. For the divine element in each one, the soul, the psychic being is situate there in the recesses of the

heart.* Also once it is contacted by an inward plunge, it awakens from its depths and begins to spread its influence over the rest of the being making the sadhana easier and safer. The purity of the soul, its radiations of love and joy, the powers of truth and knowledge inherent in it begin to express themselves in an increasing measure automatically displacing the undivine elements of ignorance, ego and falsehood which are

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* There are many authentic passages in the Upanishads on the presence of the Divine in the core of one's heart. A typical description in the symbolic imagery common to these texts is from the *Dhyanabindu Up.*:

हृदिस्थाने अष्टदलपद्मम् वर्तते तन्मध्ये रेखावलयं कृत्वा जीवात्मरूपम् ज्योतिरूपमनुमात्रं वर्तते तस्मिन् सर्वं प्रतिष्ठितं भवति सर्वं जानाति ।

"In the seat of the heart is a lotus of eight petals. In its centre is jivatma of the form of jyotis and atomic in size, moving in a circular line. In it is located everything. It knows everything." (94)

always a formidable danger ever ready to twist the direction of the sadhana.

Dhyana is thus a discipline to rise out of the normal bounded life of the senses and grow into the realms of a higher or a deeper Consciousness of the Divine. It is a state that one gradually builds up in which the system is put in tune with the purer and higher vibrations of the Divine and laid open to their workings of purification and liberation. During these moments, one begins to live, however imperfectly, in a state which is above the murk of ignorance and darkness. One accustoms the system to the breath of a higher life and it gradually imbibes in its texture the spirit and even the subtle substance of the Divine Being in its varied manifestations of Peace, Light, Knowledge, Joy and Power. It has got to be supported by the general nourishment of the background of one's

day-to-day life. What one does or thinks during the rest of the hours needs to be in accord with the spirit and tenor of the period of Dhyana which is only a high-point of the course of one's life-movement. To ensure the provision of such an indispensable background, ancient Indian thought has built up a Science as it were which one has to follow for successful Meditation. It was this tradition that was systematised by Patanjali in his famous *Yoga Sutras* to which we shall now turn for the frame-work of our study.

CHAPTER III

YOGA

TO LIVE a higher life needs a higher equipment.

A whole-sided effort is required in all the parts of the being for its upliftment from the gross animal state of existence to which the normal human is heir by birth. To that end a preliminary discipline which cultures the mind, life and body in the gradual elimination of the elements of inertia, ignorance and falsehood, instils an aspiration and builds up a will for a progressive elevation of them through the pathways of religion, morality and mental enlightenment into the purer heights of the Spirit must be

undergone. The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali lay down a ten-fold discipline of *yamas* and *niyamas*, restraints and injunctions, each five in number :

Yama and Niyama

ahimsā, absinence from injury, from violence to another in thought, speech and act ; *satyam,* truth, truth of thought, speech and action ; *asteyam*, abstinence from appropriation of what does not belong to oneself either physically or mentally in preparation to it ; *brahmacarya*, continence, retention of the life-giving and life-building sex-energy without wastage in any form, gross or subtle ; *aparigraha*, abstinence from greed, from covetousness which grabs at everything for one's own present or future enjoyment.

These rules of abstention, it will be

observed, are more indicative than exhaustive ; they emphasise the necessity of a full control and mastery over the desires, passions and egoistic impulses that keep one bound to the unregenerate life of the animal, *Paśu.*

The *niyamas,* observances, counselled by Patanjali are : *śauca*, purity, purity not only of the physical body which is a simple matter, but purity of thought and purity of life-energy also ; *santoṣa*, contentment which keeps the system in a state of happy ease free from the habitual restlessness of unfulfilled desire or unreached accomplishment ; *tapas*, austerity, habit of a ready assembling of one's faculties for a heightened expression of their potentialities ; *svādhyāya*, assiduous study of the Word and works of Knowledge that have come down from authentic sources ; *Iśvara-praṇidhāna*, adoration and joyful acceptance

of the Will of the Lord, an attitude of devotion and surrender to the Divine.

This preliminary discipline should be woven into the every-day life, made an integral part of it, so as to prepare the ground for a successful practice of Dhyana. These observances and prohibitions are designed to work out and ensure a reasonable purity in the being, a sufficient rejection of inertia, passion and egoism, and an attitude of aspiration and receptivity to the Grace of God. These restraints and enjoinings are not, it must be emphasised, ends in themselves ; they are not and cannot be the object of life. Their role is only preparatory. All of them or many of them may not be necessary in cases where the needed preparation has been already done by other means or during previous lives. What is important is that a minimum condition of purity,

physical and psychological,* a relative freedom from thraldom to the life of the senses under the drive of ego, and a keen aspiration to realise the truth of one's being should be there before serious Dhyana can be undertaken.

Time

That done, there is the question of the proper *time* for Dhyana. Dhyana or the poise of Dhyana should in fact be constant, though not all over the being, yet in some essential part of it ; in that sense Dhyana has no time as such. It is ceaseless. Yet there have to be periods, especially in the earlier stages

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* ज्ञानप्रसादेन विशुद्धसत्वस्ततस्तु तं पश्यते निष्कलं ध्यायमानः ।

Only when the inner being is purified by a glad serenity of knowledge, then indeed, meditating, one beholds the Spirit indivisible. (*Mundaka Up.*, III. 1.8.)

— and even for a long time afterwards till things work spontaneously and without the necessity of mental attention — when Dhyana is to be practised as a discipline, as the sole preoccupation. The best time in the day for this purpose is of course the early hours of the morning, especially between three and five a.m.* At that hour even Nature is most co-operative. Physical Nature is at sleep, so to say, and there is a helpful quiet in the atmosphere. The forces of activity are not yet in motion. Besides, the subtler layers of Mother-Nature are more accessible during this hour and the withdrawal of the consciousness from external surfaces to the

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* Incidentally we may mention here that the vitality in the body being at a low ebb at this part of the night, there is then, usually, an uprush of impressions from the sub-conscious, especially forces of sex and other chaotic movements in sleep. To wake up by then is the best way to avoid their attacks.

inner depths is easier at this time. Then too comes the *brahma muhurta*, hour of God, of the ancients when, in the words of the Veda, "Coming at early morn He gives the Treasure." * The first span of Dhyana is best done at this early hour.†

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*प्राता रत्नं प्रातरित्वा दधाति ।

(*Rig Veda*, I 125. 1.)

† In the beginning there is the difficulty of sleep for most. But this can be gradually overcome by going to bed earlier in the nights and cultivating a strong will to terminate the sleep by the chosen hour. In course of time no external support for waking is found necessary. One wakes up at the precise minute. Even the sleep which may creep in during meditation can be, by persistence of will and aspiration, deepened into a state of inner consciousness.

It is to be noted, by the way, that after the sitting is over, there is a very strong tendency in the system to sleep again. But this shall be resisted at all costs. For if indulged, there takes place a rapid plunge into the sub-conscient and most of the gains made in meditation are swallowed up. One can see the after-effects very concretely in the discomfort felt in the limbs thereafter.

Equally important is the hour before retiring at night. For the condition of the Dhyana in the morning is determined considerably by the condition of the sleep in the previous might and the experiences gone through during that sleep, and that in turn is largely governed by the state of the being before sleep. For this purpose, it is most advisable that there is a sitting for Dhyana, preceded if necessary by a short reading or light study which steadies and calms the mind and helps its energies to converge naturally to the field of one's choice. One must learn to glide into sleep from this Dhyana ; if that is done then it is possible in course of time to impart the character of Dhyana to the sleep ; more and more of the sleep becomes conscious and the movement that is active in the being during the Dhyana continues longer and longer even in sleep, with

the result that when one gets up for Dhyana in the morning it becomes a kind of continuation of the earlier sitting.

In between there are two periods which are suitable if they are feasible in the modern day conditions. The hour at dusk, when there is an ebb in the tide of Nature, is again a helpful period.* There is also a time during the mid-day when the physical being needs an interval of rest or relaxation ; this time can be taken advantage of by converting the rest or nap into a kind of meditation. One must put oneself into the poise of Dhyana and then relax.

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* This and the early hour in the morning, it will be noted, are the two periods chosen by our ancients for *sandhyā*, the solemn outer ritual for the daily affirmation of inner consecration to the Divine in its central manifestations in the universe. *samyag dhyāyanti yasyām sā*, (the juncture) when meditation is done excellently.

Gradually it will be seen that the movement of Dhyana extends itself throughout the period of the brief sleep and one wakes up refreshed with a calm composure.

These are, we may say, periods that can best be chosen for Dhyana. But that is not to say that Dhyana cannot be done at other hours. As we observed before, the ideal condition is when there is some poise or status of Dhyana in the being all the time. One can choose the hours that suit one most for special sittings. Only it is important that once chosen the same timings must be observed every day. For there is a cycle, a rhythm in the movement of forces — spiritual as much as material — and a strong tendency is formed for the right conditions for meditation to repeat themselves at the precise hour every day. It is also important — imperative we

could say — that when there is a spontaneous movement of Dhyana, one should take note of it as an indication of a readiness in the being to register a fresh advance on the Path or as a call from the Unseen to turn inward and receive what lies awaiting, and must co-operate with it as best as one can. Another point of attention is that there should be no sudden or abrupt coming out from the state of meditation ; the consciousness that is indrawn takes a little time to move back to its physical status and a sudden movement as this may result in an unpleasant jerk or a nervous shock and at times more serious maladjustments.

Note also that these sittings cannot be isolated from the rest of the hours in the day. Each meditation is actively influenced and even determined by the events that have happened in all the

various planes of the being prior to that hour. That is why the course of one's life should be so regulated as to provide the right background and soil for the seed of Dhyana to take root and sprout.

The hour of meditation forms the high peak period of the indrawal or ascent or receptive mood of the normal consciousness. Just as it has a before, it has also an after. Every effort should be made to stabilise and assimilate the gains recorded during each meditation. The state of consciousness attained in meditation should be prolonged as much as possible in the normal waking or active conditions. It is only by such a conscious effort to extend the influence and range of meditation to longer and longer stretches of one's daily life that the way is opened for meditation, Dhyana, to become normal.

ASANA

Next comes *asana*, the most suitable physical position to be taken by the body for Dhyana. Here also meditation should be and is possible in any position, e.g. sitting, standing, lying down, walking or even running. It depends upon the extent to which meditation has become natural and also on the habits of the body. There are a number of asanas recommended in the Yoga treatises for Dhyana. But the truth of the matter has been succinctly put by that master of brevity, Patanjali: *sthira-sukhamāsanam*,* that which ensures stability and ease is the right posture. What suits one may not be convenient to another. Each one has

* *Vide* also: स्थिरसुखम् आसनम् इति न नियम: any posture that is easy and steady is asana; there is no rule. (*Sānkhya Sutras*, VI. 24)

to choose the position most favourable to him. As one Upanishad puts it, there are as many postures as there are living creatures.*

Sitting is the best position, *asinah*.† That in which one can sit longest with the least effort, that in which the body remains free from fatigue is the most natural position.‡ When the natural asana is found one forgets the act of sitting and the mind is freed from the sense of the body. This collected immobility of the body provides the needed physical support for the body to bear and contain the workings of the Higher

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*आसनानि च तावन्ति यावन्त्यो जीवजातयः । (*Dhyānabindu Up.*, 41)

† *Brahmasutras*, IV. 1. 8.

‡ Personally we have found the following position adopted by some Yogins to be most helpful. It is to sit with legs folded, the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot simply folded below the right thigh.

or Deeper Consciousness set active in the Meditation.

It is important to note that whatever the posture, the spinal column and the head should be kept erect.* The back, the neck and the head should be in a straight line.† The body, particularly

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* In Yogas like the Kundalini or the Hatha Yoga it is indispensable that this erect position of the spine, *merudanda*, is taken up from the beginning and maintained throughout. For it is only in such a position that there can be a free movement of the Kundalini Shakti which is awakened from its resting place at the base of the spinal column and raised upwards to the crown of the head.

† त्रिरुन्नतं स्थाप्य समं शरीरं,

placing the body in a straight posture, holding the chest, throat and head erect. (*Shev. Up.*, II. 8.)

सुखासनस्थः शुचिः समग्रीवशिरः शरीरः,

sitting in an easy posture, pure, with neck, head and body erect. (*Kaivalya Up.*, 5.)

समं कायशिरोग्रीवं धारयन् अचलं स्थिरः,

holding the body, head and neck erect, motionless. (*Bh. Gita*, VI. 13.)

the head, should not be allowed to droop for that position invites sleep. An erect position of the upper body gives the necessary support and facility for the right regulation of the nerve-force in the body and the governance of the prana, the life-energy, as expressed in the act of breathing which claims our attention next.

Pranayama

Regulation of breath, measured inspiration, retention and expiration * prolonging the stretch of each breath, *prāṇāyāma*, is next enjoined by Patanjali. There is a direct connection between mental faculties and the life-energies that support them in the body. Each affects and controls the other. The state of the vital energies is reflected in

* *Pūraka, Kumbhaka, Recaka,* usually done in the proportion of 1 : 4 : 2.

the state of the mental movements. By the control of breathing which is the most seizable of the operations of the vital energy, it is possible to control the activities of the mind-energy. The rhythm of life-breath governs the flow of modifications in the mental stuff, *cittavṛttis*. Hence this exercise of control and direction of breath is recommended to the initiate in order to quiet the incessant thought-activity in his mind. There are indeed other important and far-reaching benefits too. Pranayama controls the life-breath which is at the head of the five-fold operation of the Breath of Life, Prana in the body. As we know, it is the Universal Life-Force, Prana that individualises itself in the body and functions in five different forms: as *prāṇa*, the incoming breath, as *apāna*, the outgoing breath, as *samāna*, the breath that equalises the

operations of the two and preserves an equilibrium in the energies, as *vyāna*, the breath pervasive that spreads the life-energy throughout the system, as udāna, the upward breath that acts as a channel to connect the individual life with the Life Universal. Of all these five formulations of the Breath of Life, the first which brings in the general Life-force, the breath taken in, is the premier and aptly named as *prāṇa* after the Prana Original. When *prāṇa*, this breath of life is controlled and regulated there is an automatic regulation of the other operations of the life-energy, a correction of their usually mixed and irregular action into a harmonised working. Besides rectifying the imbalance of the five currents of the vital energy, this discipline of breath purifies the nerve channels also and clears the way for a smooth and effective flow of the purer energies

throughout the body, subtle and physical. It becomes possible to direct the life-force to any part of the system where there might be deficiency and maintain a sound health of body, life and mind. Pranayama also opens up the communication between the universal Life and the individual life-energies and thus there is a great increase in the energy and strength available to the practitioner. And at its best, when combined with the repetition of a sacred Mantra, Pranayama can bring about the inflow of a higher divine Energy in the being. This purification, ordered regulation and direction of the life-energies in the subtle and the physical bodies sets into action faculties and powers hitherto lying latent in the system for want of adequate stimulii and due to obstructions in their functioning. The main dynamism of life-energy lying coiled up

in the subtle body, the Kundalini Shakti, is awakened and its diverse manifestations of Power begin to appear in the different centres of the body and with increasing subtilisation and dissolution of the veils of Nature in Ignorance there spread the rays of the Soul within.

This in short is the rationale of the Science of Pranayama. While Pranayama may not be necessary in all lines of Yoga for Dhyana, especially in our Yoga, it is helpful to apply the principle underlying it for steadying the mind and purifying the system. Even in work-a-day life, it may be observed that when the mind is disturbed and the being is restless, a few deep breaths go a long way to quiet the turbulent state. A little of deep breathing before going into meditation helps considerably to clear the air of the disturbing stresses. And *if one follows the breath inward* with

sufficient attention, it automatically acts as a brake on the running activity of the mind. Slowly the outspread faculties of the mind begin to converge into a narrower and narrower field; that is the beginning of the self-gathering of the mind which is the first step in Dhyana.

PRATYAHARA

For the mind has to be withdrawn from its habitual outflowings. The senses and the mind have, as the Upanishad puts it,* their doors opening outward and they naturally turn outside to their objects. Each sense is pulled out by its object and the mind follows the sense.

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*पराञ्चि खानि व्यतृणत्स्वयंभूतः तस्मात् पराङ् पश्यति नान्तरात्मन्,

The self-born has set the doors of the body to face outwards, therefore the soul of a man gazes outward. (*Katha Up.*, II. 1. 1.)

A hundred pulls operate at every moment, the mind is in a constant state of distraction, now running in this and now in that direction. This outward movement of the senses and the mind is to be arrested and the attention turned inward. This necessary step of withdrawal of the mind and its faculties from their usual objects is called *pratyāhāra*. A strong will is necessary to practise this part of the discipline and a great amount of patience too. For the outward tendency asserts itself, by sheer force of habit, and till the reverse habit of inward turning is formed, it is a constant tussle between one's will and vigilance and the pull of mechanical nature. However if there is a sincere aspiration behind the effort, a strong will to reject the claims of outer nature and a continued persistence in the will, the external pull begins to weaken and

the mind is gradually loosened from its grip.

CONCENTRATION

But the normal mind needs something for its object. It cannot ordinarily remain without some movement or activity. If an external object is denied then it must have an internal object on which its energies can converge and flow. So the next step after withdrawal of the mind from outer objects is to provide it with a single object within on which it can remain concentrated. In certain disciplines even an outer object like a fine point or a flame (as in *trāṭaka*) is used for this concentration of the mind; but this object is 'outer' only in name, for it does not draw the mind out of its circle of attention. This concentration of the mental energies on a single object and a continued *holding of it thereon* is

dhāraṇā. In spiritual disciplines like Dhyana and Yoga the object chosen depends upon the nature of the discipline and the aim. But it represents the Divine which is the object of all seeking. It can be a Form, a Name, a Thought-Formula, an Idea reflecting the Truth underlying the Sadhana. The Form that is chosen for concentration may be an Image or a Symbol of God which is contemplated upon with adoration and feeling ; it can be the Name of a chosen Deity which is repeated as a Japa backed up by mental concentration ; or it can be an Idea, a formula like the Mahavakyas of the Upanishad *

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*प्रज्ञानम् ब्रह्म । Consciousness is Brahman.
(*Aitareya Up.*, III. 3.)

तत् त्वमसि । Thou art That.
(*Chandogya Up.*, VI. 8. 7.)

अहं ब्रह्मास्मि । I am Brahman.
(*Brihad. Up.*, I. 4. 10.)

on which the mind concentrates itself exclusively for absorbing its import. In all cases the outer form or sound or thought-form is only the starting point. The very principle of concentration is, as we have seen, that if it is done for a considerable time with sufficient intensity then the object concentrated upon slowly yields the truth of its substance. The Breath of the Reality that is concealed behind the line of the Image or the Symbol, the Truth of the Being with which the significant Name is charged,

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अयमात्मा ब्रह्म । This Self is Brahman.
(*Mandukya Up.*, 1. 2.)

धनुर्गृहीत्वौपनिषदं सहास्त्रं शरं ह्युपासानिशितं संधयीत।
आयम्य तद्भागवतेन चेतसा लक्ष्यं तदेवाक्षरं सोम्य विद्धि॥

Take up the bow of the Upanishad, that mighty weapon, set to it an arrow sharpened by adoration, draw the bow with a heart wholly devoted to the contemplation of That, and O fair son, penetrate into that as thy target, even into the Immutable. (*Mundaka Up.*, II. 2.3.)

the Spirit of the Eternal which is clothed in the Form of the Idea—all deliver themselves in their meaning. They flow and grow into the mind that is centred upon them.

This concentration is successful to the extent the consciousness of the whole being is gathered behind the mind which becomes a fine point of absorption. No doubt this is a strenuous process but if there be genuine interest in a subject concentration follows naturally and easily. In Dhyana, if the aspiration is keen and one-pointed, the mind gets the needed support from it and concentration ceases to be difficult.

Before passing to the next step we would like to mention here that when there is this gathering and concentration of the consciousness there is a general lifting up of all the faculties of the being and some of them find a natural entry

into the subtler planes of existence. One may hear various kinds of sounds, see visions of different kinds, smell fragrances—known and unknown—and even savour flavours of various types.* Some

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*नीहारधूमार्कानिलानिलानां खद्योतविद्युत्स्फटिकशशिनाम् । एतानि रूपाणि पुरःसराणि

Mist and smoke, the sun, the fire and the wind, the fire-fly and the lightning, the crystal and the moon—these are the forms that precede. (*Shvet. Up.*, II. 11.)

यथा महारजनं वासो, यथा पाण्ड्वाविकं, यथेन्द्रगोपो यथा अग्न्यार्चिः, यथा पुण्डरीकम्, यथा सकृत् विद्युत्।

Saffron-hued raiment, red coloured beetle, flame of fire, lotus flower, sudden flash of lightning . . . such forms. (*Brihad. Up.*, 3. 6.)

श्रूयते...नादो नानाविधो महान्...आदौ जलधिजीमूतभेरीनिर्झरसंभवः । मध्ये मर्दलशब्दाभो घण्टाकाहलजस्तथा ॥ अन्ते तु किन्किणीवंशवीणाभ्रमरनिस्वनः...महाभेर्यादि...

He hears many loud sounds . . . like those proceeding from the ocean, clouds, kettle-drum, and cataracts . . . from mardala, bell and horn . . .

of them do not directly concern the object of concentration at all ; they are simply phenomena, natural on the subtler planes, that greet the rising or expanding consciousness. But there are some experiences presented to the vision or the audition of the seeker which have a bearing on his sadhana by way of indications of the gains achieved or the direction to be taken etc. In any case they are all to be noted without undue elation and excitement and a legitimate use made of them for further progress.

MEDITATION

Concentration, *dhāraṇā*, we have seen, is the holding of mind, the subject,

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from tinkling bells, flute, vina and bees . . . kettle-drum, etc. (*Nadabindu Up.*, 32-26.)

The *Hamsa Upanishad* speaks of ten kinds of sounds : chini ; chinchini ; bell-sound ; sound of conch ; of lute ; of cymbals ; of flute ; of drum ; of mridanga ; and of clouds.

concentrated upon an object, outer or inner. As the concentration proceeds there is a gradual fading of the distinction between the subject and the object; the observing or contemplating mind loses itself in the object of concentration whether it is a Form, a Name or an Idea. It is absorbed in the contents of the object that are being unrolled to its consciousness to the exclusion of all other thought. *This is meditation*, Dhyana, where there is a continuing oneness in the mental seizure, *pratyaikatānatā dhyānam*.* There is no concentration at one point as such. The whole of the mind (and the consciousness behind it) becomes one with the object of meditation which fills the mind and eventually becomes, so to say, the subject itself. The mind in meditation is free from the stress and strain of con-

* *Yoga Sutra*, III. 2.

centration. It is naturally relaxed and released into the contents of the object. This then is the difference between Concentration and Meditation : concentration is the summoning and the raising of all the faculties of one's consciousness into a pitch of intense attentivity ; meditation is the release of the gathered consciousness into a state of receptivity and identification with the object of contemplation. It is in such a state of perfected meditation, *samrādhane*,* that Brahman-Consciousness can be experienced.

SAMADHI

As the meditation proceeds and deepens, the mind begins to get absorbed in the object to the exclusion of all outer objects of perception. Thought-

* *Brahma Sutras*, III. 3. 24.

activity continues, but it is solely confined to the object of contemplation and in fact proceeds from it. The three separate categories, *tripuṭi*, that are present from the start of the meditation, the subject, the object and the knowledge, tend to lose their lines of demarcation and the perceiving consciousness, the object perceived and the knowledge so attained all begin to coalesce into one. This state of absorption, in which the mental being loses its separate identity and takes on the nature of the object so completely as to become one with it, as it were, is called Samadhi.*

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* There is an interesting passage in the *Kurma Purana* (Chapter 64) which gives an accurate description of the steps leading to Dhyana and its culmination in Samadhi :

To stall the senses from their natural movement among their objects is Pratyahara. To confine the mind in locations like the heart-lotus, navel and head, etc. is Dharana. To centre the mind around one object and keep its flow on it continuing with-

In Dhyana the individual is aware that he is meditating. When this awareness also disappears it is Samadhi, *dhyāna-vismṛtiḥ samādhiḥ.** There are various grades of this Samadhi, the first six of which are also called *samāpattis*, states of attainment of the nature of the object of meditation.

The first is the *savitkara samādhi*, contemplative, in which condition the *śabda*, Word, Name, *artha*, Meaning, Form, and *jnāna*, the Knowledge of their relation are all rolled into one absorbed state of the perceiving mind. The duality of the subject and the object remains ; the relativity remains.

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out any other movement (in the mind) is Dhyana. That is Samadhi when the mind no more supports itself on the object but is one with the meaning (nature) of the object. Twelve Pranayamas make one Dharana ; twelve Dharanas make one Dhyana ; twelve Dhyanas make one Samadhi. (38-42.)

* *Mandala Brahmana Up.*, I. 1.

When the mind is freed from even these perceivings of *śabda* and *artha* and is filled with a direct knowledge of the nature of the object, it is called *nirvitarka samādhi*, supra-contemplative.

The above two states refer to the gross, denser objects of meditation. When the objects are of a subtler type —subtle elements, qualities, abstract ideas etc.—the state of absorption in which the thought-movement works within the terms of time, space and causation, is called *savicāra samādhi*, reflective.

When it is devoid of this categorised thinking* it is termed the *nirvicāra samādhi*, supra-reflective. As this state

* On meditation's mounting edge of trance
Great stairs of thought climbed up to unborn heights
Where Time's last ridges touch eternity's skies
And Nature speaks to the spirit's absolute.
Sri Aurobindo : *Savitri* (Book II. 11.)

of *nirvicāra samādhi* stabilises itself there comes an awareness of a brimming joy of effortless knowledge.

In this state of consciousness one is aware more of the inner means of knowledge than of the object of knowledge, of *grahaṇa* rather than the *grāhya*; one is aware of the *antaḥkaraṇa*, the inner apparatus of cognition covered by the *sattva guṇa*. This is called the *sānanda samādhi*, delight-ful.

A still higher stage is when one goes beyond even the awareness of the process of thought, the *grahaṇa*, and there is a rise of the sole consciousness of the *grāhaka*, the knower only. The self, the purusha of the individual is reflected in the *buddhi* or in the core of the stuff of intelligence, *citta*, and there is only the experience of 'I am', *asmi*. The consciousness is not yet of the pure self, there is only a reflection in the stuff

which still contains the element of *ahankāra*, ego, in however subtle a manner. This is called the *sāsmitā samādhi*, with sense of being.

One has to proceed further without tarrying in this state of contentment. The sadhaka is warned against the temptation of *rasāsvāda*, satisfied enjoyment of the delight that obtains here. In fact it is treated as one of the main obstacles* in the way of the complete Realisation.

All the states of samadhi described above are the stages of what is called the *samprajnāta samādhi*, the Samadhi in which there is knowledge—activity of some kind or another, *vikalpa*, which gives rise to impressions or velleities. These in turn form the seeds, *bīja*,

* The others being *laya* (sleep), *vikṣepa* (restlessness of the mind), *kaṣāya* (concealed impressions), etc.

of future activity and hence it is also known as *sabīja samādhi*, with Seed. Again in all the states of this Samadhi there is an object ; it may not be physical object but an object nonetheless on which the operation of the mental consciousness *supports* itself, *ālambana*. So it is also termed the *sālamba samādhi*, with support.

As the *nirvicāra samādhi*, the supra-reflective attainment of the object-nature gathers status and matures, there is the revelation of the Superconscient Knowledge, Knowledge that is not based upon the workings of the normal human mind. The consciousness so attained is called the *ṛtambharā prajnā*,* the Knowledge that bears (*bhṛ*

* In another classification there is, at this stage, what is termed *viveka-khyāti*, the Discriminative Knowledge between the Self and the not-Self, the Purusha and the Chitta. When this Knowledge destroys the vitiating elements like *asmitā*, egoity

to bear) the Truth (*ṛta*). The currents of this flow of Truth-Knowledge destroy the remnants of the lower mind-impressions.

Even these currents of Knowledge, however high they may be in origin, says the Yoga Sastra, are to be checked and silenced. When that too is successfully done, the Samadhi reaches its culmination: it becomes the *nirbīja samādhi*, a state of absorption in which there is no *bija*, no seed to sprout in any form, subtle or more subtle; *nirālamba samādhi*, having no support whatever for the mind to hold itself upon—the mind becoming one with the Self;

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and attachment, there is the awareness of the separate existence of the self. But this awareness also is not a direct knowledge, it is a reflected state of awareness, a *vṛitti* that is to be transcended by a high dispassion, *para-vairāgya*. When that is achieved there is the advent of the *dharmamegha* Samadhi, the state of the Cloud of Merit which is the harbinger of the shower of liberation to follow.

asamprajnāta samādhi (or *nirvikalpa*) where there is no stir of the consciousness even into Knowledge. The consciousness is still, alone, *kevalam*. Like the Ocean without tides, says the Upanishad.* The Self, the Purusha shines in His Glory.

* निस्तरङ्गसमुद्रवत (*Mandala Br. Up.*, II. 3.)

CHAPTER IV

DHYANA IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA

THESE are the general principles of Dhyana and the broad lines on which they work. Naturally their application differs from yoga to yoga depending upon the object that is pursued. In the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which seeks the development of man in all his fullness and the transformation of the entire human nature into a divine nature, Dhyana can play an important role. But it is neither the sole nor the whole means. The physical or the psycho-physical methods of this discipline are taken up

and replaced by a working of a higher order, the operations of a spiritual Force which effects all the results of the lower working but in a more radical manner.

The central fact of this yoga is a change of consciousness and this is effected by a gradual surrender of oneself in his consciousness to the Divine Shakti. This surrender is supported and carried onward on the wheels of aspiration and the rejection of what is alien to the spirit of the aspiration. It is this Divine Shakti to which one opens himself in his mind, in the heart and in all the rest of his being, that percolates wherever there is an opening, settles and goes on extending itself. The one condition for a successful working of this Shakti is that the individual should be aware of it, receptive to it and consciously collaborative with it. It is a question of temperament, training and

nature how one does it. Indeed it can be done by Dhyana but only up to a certain extent. By concentration, meditation and samadhi one withdraws himself from all outer movements and plunges into the deeper or the higher recesses of his consciousness where the Divine Shakti can act more and more directly and draw his inner being into its fold. In these purer and deeper states of Consciousness which are opened up in the conditions of samadhi, there is attained a close proximity, an intimate experience, even a kind of identity with the Divine whether in its several statuses of manifestation or in the soleness of its Being. But this is not the crown. In this Path the realisation within has to be extended outward, the change of status of the soul, the inner being, has to arrive in the outer nature, not merely remain in the inner

depths or supernal heights of the being, if the total transformation of the human into the Divine is to be done. For that purpose a combination of other processes to supplement and to complement the action and the results of Dhyana is necessary. The sadhaka of this Yoga has to canalise the gains of purification, intensification and progression of the consciousness into the workings of a Higher Knowledge replacing the mentalisings of the lower limited instrument, and into the impulsions and effectuations of the enlightened will ; draw up the emotions and other movements of the heart and the mind into the sieve, *pavitra* of the Veda, of the layers of consciousness refined and illumined by the vibrations of the Superconscient to which one bares oneself in Dhyana and pour them out in their transformed charge. The Calm, the Peace that is

established in the course of Dhyana in the inner being must be extended and naturalised in the exterior parts as well and even the physical body, should develop into a column of Peace. This dynamisation of the growing spiritual perfection within and the slow transformation of the whole range of human nature into a Divine Supernature is done directly by the Yoga-Force at work on its own large lines in which Dhyana may or may not enter at every stage and in every case. At their best, Dhyana and its culmination, Samadhi, provide the psychological condition, the environment and the mood for the Divine Force to work effectively and establish itself in the being. The foundations are laid and the individual consciousness is taught to attune itself to the vibrations of the Higher Consciousness, to receive and absorb its very substance into itself.

But this can be done by other means also. What those means are and how they work is a subject by itself which would take us beyond the proper limits of the present study.
